



Podcast 1: Structuring an Effective Homework Help and Tutoring Session From Beginning to End

Welcome to Y4Y's Podcast series, "Structuring Successful Homework Help and Tutoring Sessions!" I'm Andrew, and I'm a member of the You for Youth (Y4Y) Technical Assistance Team. In this series, we will interview out-of-school time professionals about their experience in helping youth get the most out of their homework help and tutoring sessions. Joining us today for our first podcast is Danica, a homework help facilitator, and her Site Coordinator, Jasmine, here to discuss their challenges around facilitating a strong homework session. Specifically, we asked them to share a little about how they set up a session to help students who either needed support focusing and organizing their daily work, or needed a little more structure and motivation to get their assignments done.

Andrew: Ladies, thank you for joining us today.

Danica and Jasmine in broken unison: Thanks for having us!/Of course, Thank you!

Andrew: Danica, what do you find to be the most challenging part of running effective homework help sessions?

Danica: Homework time is one of the most challenging hours of my day. Attempting to tutor when students come unprepared, show little interest in doing their work or are too frustrated to try is so frustrating. I remember turning to Jasmine for advice on how to help students when they are resistant.

Jasmine: That's right, and I asked Danica to tell me more about how she was gauging whether students were unprepared or disinterested.

Danica: I told her that homework time begins every day at 3:30. Students know this. When we signal the change, they should get their books out and start working. If they need help, they should ask so I know who is struggling.

Andrew: How many students can do their homework without any or much help?

Danica: At first, I honestly didn't know.

Jasmine: That's when I recommended that we develop some routines first. Once those routines were in place, staff and students could get a better sense of whether homework help, or tutoring was needed. So, we started exploring what students really need to successfully complete their homework during the session.

Andrew: Did you have thoughts on that, Danica?

Danica: Absolutely! They need to know what assignments are due when, about how long various assignments will take to complete, which assignments they can do on their own and which they might require assistance from myself or another adult.

Jasmine: We can then create systems and routines that would allow for students to learn how to organize their workload, something referred to as 'executive function skills'. As students mastered these skills, through the established routines, they would then have the skills needed to work on



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more advanced skills, like self-advocacy, where they can ask for assistance and they knew who and how to ask because they understand the assignment and what is needed.

Andrew: Makes perfect sense. What was your next step?

Danica: We asked ourselves what would be the ideal way for students to start each session. I lobbied for letting students set up for work and make a list of what they needed to get done, and by when.

Jasmine: I thought this made a lot of sense, and felt that we could actually bring this into several of our different clubs and activities by establishing a routine that students did at the beginning of all sessions where they had to organize or manage their workload. So, we used something called a priority list.

Andrew: What kind of priority list, exactly?

Jasmine: You start by grouping students in the same class who have the same teachers for tutoring. You could also do this in your activities like project-based learning type groups, where you group students based on the project that they are doing. Once you have the group, you next have a volunteer write down the tasks that are due, along with their due dates, as their peers call them out. Then, you have students categorize each of the assignments. So, for example, Group A is made up of items that need to be done now, because they are due immediately or they'll require a lot of support from the adult in the room. Group B includes items that are due within a few days or need to be completed collaboratively, with peers. Finally, Group C contains items that are either due in the future or are quick and easy, so students can do them later without the support of an adult.

Danica: I loved the idea that the students would be creating their own tasks lists, knowing it would help them focus and organize their daily work. It also helped me see whether it was homework help or tutoring which students needed. When they put everything in Group A, it's a sign that mastering the material didn't happen that day. I was still a little stumped on how to separate students between Homework Help and Tutoring.

Andrew: So, what did you suggest, Jasmine?

Jasmine: Next, we mapped out the physical space. We considered what types of spaces Danica's students enjoyed working in.

Danica: It always surprises me how different these work habits are! Some students need quiet at tables and others do better when there is a bit of background noise. Also, different students prefer different types of seating.

Jasmine: So I suggested that we create zones. Students could start by sitting wherever they wanted to create their priority lists, pick or choose a zone. And then after that, we would invite them to move to the space they believed would best help them complete their identified work for the day.



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Andrew: Was this a logistical nightmare? What did your zones look like?

Jasmine: I recommended a quiet area, a partner area, a team area and a tutoring zone. And, as much as possible, varying the seating in the areas. This way students can sit how they want and work with or without their peers. We can then pull the students into the tutoring zone as needed.

Danica: I still felt like we needed sort of structure or routine for the middle and end of homework and tutoring sessions, though.

Andrew: Did you agree, Jasmine?

Jasmine: I did. I actually suggested having students check-off work as it's completed as one of the last routines. It seems really simple but marking off items on a task list really feels great. It's a fantastic form of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Danica: And then, as a sort of wrap-up at the end, we have students return to their priority lists and reflect on progress. We ask them guiding questions like:

- Did you accomplish everything on your list today?
- Were any of the items easier or harder than you anticipated? Or,
- What does tomorrow need to look like?

Jasmine: We really did quickly see a positive culture shift when we built-in and established these routines, didn't we, Danica?

Danica: We sure did! Instead of barking, "Now get to work" right away, I encourage all students to pick one task from Group A that they believe can be completed within the time remaining. This also gives both staff and students a routine for changing up *how* we work. Sometimes students work independently, other times they'll work with me, and then we also offer opportunities for them to work in small groups.

Jasmine: We've been super excited to see how students have responded, and how positively all of our staff has reacted. Frustrations across the board have really begun to subside.

Andrew: It seems like such a simple concept, but it sounds like being intentional in instituting routines at homework and tutoring time, your 21st CCLC program is running much more smoothly now!

Danica: Oh for sure.

Andrew: Thank you both for joining us, and thank you, listeners, for making Y4Y your partner in professional development.